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*The Danger of Excesses in the Pursuit
of Liberty.*

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

Univerfity of OXFORD,

At St. MARY's,

On Monday, January 31. 1736-7.

Being the Day appointed to be kept as the Day
of the Martyrdom of

King CHARLES the Firft.

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Queen's College in Oxford.

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I P E T E R II. 16.

*As Free; and not using Your Liberty
for a Cloke of Maliciousness; but
as the Servants of GOD.*

“**T**Hat the best Things are at once the most liable to be abused, and attended with the worst Consequences when They are so”; is a Complaint which human Affairs give Us frequent Occasion to make; but never perhaps more just Occasion than in the Instance suggested by the Words before Us. To distinguish the exact Boundary between *Liberty* and *Licentiousness*, and to say precisely, where the one ends and the other begins, requires more Discernment than We are often Masters of even in our cool Deliberations; much less can so much Accuracy be expected from Men engaged in the Eagerness of Pursuit, and the Heat of Action. And yet *true Liberty* is not more valuable, than *Liberty falsely so called* is dangerous. When once Men have pass'd the Line between them, the farther They pursue Liberty, the farther They remove from it; 'till at last They find Themselves in Those very Depths of Slavery, which They vainly imagined They were taking the most speedy Course to avoid,

For an Instance of what is here observed, We need go no farther, than to the Times which brought on, and immediately followed, the Tragedy of This Day: Times, not more distinguish'd, in their Beginning, by a *passionate Zeal* for Liberty, with regard to Religion and Civil Government, than They were in their Progress by a most *malicious Abuse*, and in their Conclusion by a most *deplorable Want* of it, in Both. The Effects of an uncontrollable Licence were then severely felt; when This deluded Nation too late discovered, It had exchanged a well-regulated, *Legal*, Liberty, in one of the best Constitutions of Government, and under one of the most pious of Princes, for lawless Tyranny in every Shape, under a Succession of insolent Ufurpers: And a decent and edifying Form of Worship, under an Order of Church-Governours Primitive and *Apostolical*, for numerous wild and monstrous Productions of Enthusiasm, agreeing in Nothing but Superstition and Blindness, made still less supportable by wearing the venerable Names of Liberty and pure Religion.

Such an Example as This ought certainly to be a standing Admonition to all succeeding Generations: And without Question it has been, and, so long as it is duly remember'd, always will be, a considerable Check upon That Spirit of Licentiousness, to which We of This Nation seem to have too powerful a Tendency. Sensible of This, and (as it should seem) in Order to prevent any such Impressions as a just Notion and proper Remembrance of Those Times might be apt to make, Some have endeavoured to destroy

stroy the Credit of our most faithful Accounts of them, and to substitute others better calculated for the Purpose of Disguising. The Success of such Attempts among rational and impartial Men, has not, I presume, been much to be boasted of. Yet, as in Calumnies of all Kinds *numerous* Accusations, which *singly* taken would be ineffectual, often force their Way merely by being *boldly repeated*; so it seems to have happened with the, otherwise feeble, Efforts of Libertinism in the Case before Us. The large Advances We have for some Time been making towards a Disregard to all Order and Authority, both in Matters *Civil* and *Sacred*, under the specious Appearance of *Liberty* and *Free-Thinking*, are such as can hardly be otherwise accounted for, than by supposing Us to have in a great Measure lost the Remembrance of Those Distractions, which the like Pretences, not quite a *Century* ago, introduced into This Church and Nation.

An Attempt to adjust the *Extent* of *Religious* and *Civil Liberty*, and to suggest the *destructive Consequences* of *Excesses* in either of them from the Experience of our Fore-fathers, may not at such a Time as This be wholly *unseasonable*; nor will it be thought foreign to the Design of This Appointment, by which *We* are particularly directed to recommend and enforce the great Duty of *Submission to Government*.

There were, it seems, some among the earliest Converts to Christianity, who misunderstood the Nature of their *Christian Liberty*, and perverted it to very unjustifiable Purposes. To
remedy

remedy this Inconvenience, We find the first Preachers of the Gospel scarcely ever mentioning the Name of *Liberty* without subjoyning some Caution against the Abuse of it. The Apostle in my Text (to omit other Instances) addresses Those to whom He wrote, in Terms of great Significance and Propriety upon This Subject. He admits Their Claim to *Freedom*; but then He fails not immediately to warn Them against Those mischievous Designs, to which That Claim would probably be made subservient: He reminds Them, that Their Christian Freedom, whatever might be meant by it, was certainly a *bounded Freedom*; that it left them as it found them, *Servants to GOD*, and by no Means exempted them from the Observance of *any* of *His* Institutions; that *Civil Government* came particularly entitled to their Veneration under *That* Character; and that therefore, however the *Forms* of Government might be *Ordinances of Men*, They were bound to *submit Themselves to every one of them*, which as *Strangers and Pilgrims* They should happen to live under, *for the LORD'S sake*. As *Free* indeed; yet *not using their Liberty for a Cloke of Maliciousness*; but as the *Servants of GOD*.

The Caution before Us seems to have a special Regard to Those wrong Notions of *Christian Liberty*, by which Order and Government were chiefly threaten'd in the Infancy of Christianity. There is however no Occasion to confine it to This single Point of View. The Danger now arises from *another* Quarter. The present Asserters of the Cause of Liberty seem not to think They

They have received any considerable Favours from Christianity in *That* Respect, if in any other: The Liberty they insist on is (it seems) their *Birtheright*: They (*a*) *were never in Bondage to any Man*; and therefore need not *the Truths* of the Gospel to *make Them Free*. In Order therefore to consider This Subject as usefully in general, and as suitably to the present Occasion in particular, as I can, I shall endeavour,

I. *First*, To discover the true *State* and just *Extent* of *That Liberty*, wherewith, in our several Relations and Capacities, We are *Free*.

II. *Secondly*, To illustrate the pernicious *Consequences* of *Liberty pursued too far*; as exemplify'd in the Times, which the present Solemnity calls upon Us to remember. And then

III. *Thirdly*, To conclude with a *suitable Application* of the foregoing Particulars.

I. *Freedom* is a Term of *Relative* Import, generally, if not always, implying a Respect to some Obligations, Restraints, Inconveniences, Burthens, or the like, *from* which We are said, or supposed, to be *Free*. And, as Relative Terms mutually Illustrate each other, the Extent of our Liberty in any Capacity may best be adjusted by a View of the several *Restraints* or *Obligations* We lye under in *That* Capacity: Nothing being more evident, than that in whatsoever Instances

(a) Joh. VIII. 32, 33.

We acknowledge an *Obligation* We can have no *consistent* Claim to *Liberty*.

Again: *Freedom*, to any one who shall examine His own Idea of it, will (I believe) appear to be desirable or valuable not so properly on *its own* Account, as for the Sake of *something else*; in other Words, to be rather a *Means* than an *End*. Now the Value of every Means ought to be estimated from its Conduciveness to the End proposed to be served by it. What Degrees of Liberty therefore are, in any Situation, *desireable* by Us, must be discovered by considering, What Degrees of it are likely to promote the Attainment of our proper End in That Situation: Because, should Liberty, or any Degrees of it, appear more likely to obstruct than forward the End we have in View, It must *in Proportion* cease to appear to Us *desireable*.

These Observations, if taken along with Us, will, I hope, assist Us in satisfying Two important Points of Enquiry upon the present Subject; Namely, "To what Degrees of Liberty are We *justly entitled*? And, "What Measures of Liberty are *really desireable* by Us"? And, that We may proceed with the greater Clearness, it will be of Use, (with an Eye to the Questions just mentioned) to consider Ourselves distinctly as *Men*, and as *Christians*; and, in each of these Views, first separately as *Individuals*, and then jointly as *Members of Society*.

First then; Let us see how the Case stands with us as We are *Men* and *Individuals*, abstracting from all Relation to, or Dependence upon, any of our Fellow-Creatures. In this View surely,

ly, if in any, We shall find Ourselves *absolutely* Free, subject to no Check or Control. And yet, even here the Case is quite otherwise. Man, when least dependent on any created Being, is still the *Servant of That GOD*, who first placed and continually supports Him in the State He finds Himself in: On GOD He every Moment depends *for Life and Breath and all Things*: To *Him* therefore He owes the Service and Obedience of *all* His Powers. I may add, that GOD has erected a Kind of Government in every Man's Breast, and made Him (in due Subordination to His own Authority) *a Law unto Himself*: He has implanted in each of Us a Principle, to which We are accountable for the Use of our Freedom, and the Exercise of all our Faculties; and which will acquit or condemn, reward or punish Us, *according as our Work shall be*. *Human Freedom* then is by no Means a Freedom of Thinking or Acting at all Adventures; but is a Freedom *bounded* by the Dictates of *right Reason*, and the *Laws of GOD*.

And as This is all the Liberty we can, in our Personal Capacity, *justly* lay Claim to, so more than This We cannot *prudently* wish for. Man is a Being capable of understanding *Truth*, and enjoying *Happiness*; and of both Truth and Happiness GOD is in all Cases the best, in most Cases the only, Judge. The Liberty then, that can be to Man desirable, must be conducive to, at least consistent with, the Attainment of *These* Ends: A Liberty of His *Intellectual Faculties* from Impediments in the Search of Truth; of His *Will* in the Choice of proper Means to Happiness;

piness; and of His *inferiour Powers* from such Disorders as wou'd disturb the Enjoyment of it: And all This under the Direction of That Being, who alone perfectly knows, *What Man is, and whereto He serveth, what is His Good and what is His Evil.* To claim a Liberty beyond This; to shut out Information, and to resist the Force of Evidence; to counteract the Order of our Nature, and to affect an Independence on the great Author of it; must be as irrational as it is impious; It is to challenge as a Privilege the Liberty to err and to be miserable.

A Privilege, which a *Rational* Being might have been thought incapable of desiring, had not an Affectation of the like Sort fatally discovered itself in the very *First* of the whole *Species*; and were it not the same *Spirit*, which has ever since been *working in the Children of Disobedience.* For what were all the boasted Conquests of *Epicurus* and His Followers of old, and what are all the later Efforts of the same Kind under the specious Title of *Freethinking*, but so many Struggles for an uncontroled Freedom of Thought and Action. Indeed all Schemes of Morality and Duty, from which the *Divine Authority* is excluded, are (I fear) *really*, tho' not always *designedly*, Advances towards This Freedom upon Principle, and, shou'd They generally prevail, wou'd soon be found still nearer Approaches to it in Practice. But there are not wanting more direct Attempts *to break the Bonds* of Religion *in sunder*, by asserting a Liberty of Action, not subject to the perpetual Awe of a watchful Observer, an impartial Judge, and an Almighty Aven-

Avenger: A Liberty, which at best, and supposing its Asserters successful, cou'd amount to no more than what our *first Parents* gain'd by their Exclusion from *Paradise*; I mean, a Liberty of going forth into a wild, unhospitable World without a Guide, of passing thro' it without Comfort, and of leaving it without Hope: But, in Reality, a Liberty of affronting and provoking That All-powerful Being (a) *that sitteth in the Heavens*, who at present *looks down with Derision* on all such vain Attempts; and will, if not timely appeased, one Day (b) *speak unto Their presumptuous Authors in His Wrath, and vex Them in His sore Displeasure*.

Thus far Man has been considered as *out of Society*. This however is a State in which no Number of Men ever actually existed. It was from the Beginning, and in a State of Innocence, declared *not good for Man to be alone*: And, had not GOD Himself interposed, *fallen* Men must soon have found it necessary to combine into Societies, and to constitute, as far as Men cou'd of themselves constitute, some Kind of Government. For tho' a Liberty of (c) *doing every Man what shou'd seem right in His own Eyes*, is what the *Law of Nature* does by no Means allow, yet it is, what Men in a *State of Nature* wou'd be very apt to assume: A Liberty, which wou'd soon exert itself *in biting and devouring one another*, and soon terminate in *being destroy'd one of another*.

We are come then to the Enquiry, "How Our Freedom stands as We are *Members of Society*, and how it is affected by the Introduction

(a) Psal. II. 4. (b) v. 5. (c) Judg. XVII. 6.

of *Civil Government* into the World?" And here it must be observed, that all Those Restraints, which the Law of Nature lays upon the Freedom of *Individuals*, still subsist in full Force with regard to That of *Members of Society*. Man is, from the first Moment of His Being, *the Servant of GOD*; and no Obligations arising from any subsequent Relation can set him at Liberty from Those, which result from *That unalterable* one. And thus much is, I think, allowed by All who acknowledge *any* Law of Nature. But *farther* than This some late Pretenders to great Accuracy in Disquisitions of This Kind seem very unwilling to go along with Us. That *any* of Men's *Natural* Rights or *Natural* Liberties are *receded* from at their Entrance into *Society*, is a Notion against which They have raised much Clamour; but have only, by so doing, furnished Us with a fresh Instance of That Perplexity, which will ever attend all such Reasonings upon Government as take not the *Deity* into Their Account of it. It will not be expected, I shou'd detain You upon This Point. In the most popular Governments *some* Authority there must be, and *somewhere* placed. And wheresoever *Authority* is placed, it must, if it has *any* Meaning, *create* a proportionable Obligation to Obedience, (in other Words, a proportionable Restraint upon the Freedom of Action They before enjoy'd) in Those who are *subject* to it.

But, "how shall the Measures of the *Magistrate's Authority*, and of the *Subject's Liberty*, be mutually adjusted?" This is indeed a Question of great Moment, and such, as might well deserve to be
very

very solemnly debated, were We to bear a Part in a Consultation about erecting a *New* Form of Government. But, in Truth, This is a Question, with the Discussion of which private Persons, under Governments *actually constituted*, have Nothing to do; as being *already* determined to Their Hands. For, after all our Speculations, the Obligations lying on the Members of any Community *as such*, must be measured by the *Laws* of *That* Community. *These* are at once the Standards of the Magistrates Authority, and of the Liberty of the Subject: *These* are the declared Will of the *whole* Society; and must determine That of every Member of it. A Liberty to oppose His own private Will to That of the Publick, and to resist Those Persons who are entrusted with the Execution of it, is no Part of That Liberty, which *any* Society can allow its Members: Nor can it be taken by any *Subject* without a Violation of the Duty He owes to the Government that protects Him; to Himself as greatly interested in its Peace and Good Order; and especially to That Being, whose Providence, in the Accounts of right Reason as well as Those of Revelation, (a) *ruleth in the Kingdom of Men; and giveth it to whomsoever He will.*

Legal Liberty then is all that can be *demande*d by Members of Society; and more than This cannot *consistently* be *desire*d by Any, who are willing to enjoy the Benefits of Government. 'Tis true, "You may think Yourself aggrieved by some of the *Laws* in Being;" Or, "You may dislike something in the *Form* of Government You

(a) Dan. IV. 25.

live under;" Or perhaps, "something in the Conduct of the *Persons* set over You is not as it shou'd be: And surely, a Liberty of providing for the Redress of *one's own* particular Grievances, in the most compendious Way; of supplying the Defects of an imperfect Constitution; or however, of censuring what appears faulty, and representing Things and Persons *as being what They really are*, must be desireable at least, if not allowable." So indeed the Case may appear upon a *partial* View of it. And Thus much must be granted, that, where by the Standing Rules of the Constitution some Persons are entrusted with certain Degrees of Liberty, or, to speak more properly, certain Measures of *Power*, for any of the Purposes hinted at; the Exercise of such Power by the proper Persons, on necessary Occasions, and in a legal Manner, is not only allowable but commendable. But, what if *every* Member of the Community shou'd assume a Liberty of redressing His own apprehended, or even real, Grievances; of dictating to Those whom He ought to obey; of insulting the Final Determinations of the Supreme Authority; of sitting in Judgement upon the Actions of His Governours; of treating with Indignity Those Stations and Characters which the Constitution holds Sacred; of sowing the Seeds of Discontent, and fomenting Rebellion against them: This surely is a Liberty which no Man wou'd wish to see *generally* assumed, (and yet, if 'tis allowable to *one*, it must be allowable to *all* in the same Circumstances:) 'Tis indeed a Liberty to defeat the very Ends of Government; and
must

must soon reduce Us to That State, from the Miseries of which it was one principal Design of Government to rescue and protect Us.

From These imperfect Hints We may in some Measure collect, how our Freedom stands as We are *Men*; and This both in our *Personal* Capacity as We are *Individuals*, and in our *Social* Capacity as We are *Subjects*. But We are further concern'd to enquire into the State of it in *each* respect as We are *Christians*.

It has been just observed above, that our common Parents by assuming a Liberty to which They had no Title, lost That Liberty which They were in Possession of. And, in Fact, They thereby subjected, not only Themselves, but all Their Posterity, to the worst Kind of Dominion, that of Lust and Appetite, of Sin and Death. Here then with Joy and Gratitude we proclaim, that (a) *We whom the Son hath made Free, are Free indeed*. We are Free from the Rigour and Condemnation of the *Law of Works*; from the heavy Burthen of *Jewish* Rites and Observances; from the Tyranny of our own Lufts; and from (b) *That Fear of Death*, both Temporal and Eternal, which must otherwise *all our Life-Time have kept Us in Bondage*. From all These This *Law of the Spirit of Life* has vindicated Us into the *Glorious Liberty of the Sons of GOD*. These are Immunities great and truly valuable; and of These We *Christians* may justly glory. But still, if We wou'd inherit the *Privileges*, We must pay the cheerful *Obedience*, of *Sons*. If We are (c) *made free from Sin, We are*, by an additional Obliga-

(a) Joh. VIII. 36. (b) Heb. II. 15. (c) Rom. VI. 22.

tion, *become Servants to GOD*. Our Christian Profession is far from giving Us an *unbounded Liberty of Thinking or Acting*. We must (a) *bring into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of CHRIST*: And (b) *not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him that dyed for us and rose again*.

Not but that, even in *This* Respect, *Christianity* eminently displays itself as being, what it is emphatically called, (c) *the perfect Law of Liberty*. For, after all the late Boasts of the Sufficiency of our Understandings, the Rectitude of our Wills, and the Goodness of our Affections; Every one of Us, who attends to what passes within Him, must *feel*, that His Understanding greatly *needs* Information, His Will Direction, and His Affections at once Restraint from Evil, and Incitement to Good. And, to a Creature in *such* a Situation, can it give any *just* Cause of Complaint, that His Creator, a Being of infinite Wisdom, Power, and Goodness, shou'd call upon Him for *the Obedience of Faith* to a Discovery of the most important Truths; the Readiness of His Will to accept a Proposal of the Highest Good; the Compliance of His Affections with the most engaging Motives; and, in short, the Concurrence of all His Faculties with the gracious Influences of the Divine Spirit? The self-sufficient *Deist* may call such a Proceeding an Infringement upon His Freedom of Thinking, of Choice, of Action. But the truly rational *Christian* will with humble Thankfulness embrace such an Infringement

(a) 2 Cor. X. 5. (b) — V. 15. (c) Jam. I. 25.

as only limits His Freedom by enlightening His Understanding, and denies Him no Liberty but that of destroying Himself.

Such is the State of *Christian Liberty* in our *Personal Capacity*. With regard to *Civil Societies*, Christianity, being intended for the Religion of *all Nations*, is (I conceive) in *Civil Matters* adapted to the Constitution of each, without attempting the Subversion of any. It *takes* the Laws of each Community, to which it offers itself, as it *finds* Them: And as it gives such as embrace it no Exemption from the *just* Restraints of Government, so neither does it deprive Them of any *Legal Privileges* or Immunities They were antecedently possess'd of. But, tho' Christianity has not *altered* the *Measures*, It has however greatly *enforced* the *Duty* of Obedience to the *Higher Powers*. It teaches Us, (a) *that the Powers that be are ordained of GOD*: It requires *Subjection to them from every Soul*, as to the *Ordinance of GOD*: and urges the *Necessity* of it, not only upon Prudential Considerations, *but also for Conscience sake*: It allows no *Liberty* of (b) *private Revenge*; none of illegal or tumultuous Redress of Grievances; none of (c) *despising Dominion* or *speaking Evil of Dignities*: It condemns, in very strong Terms, all *Resisting of the Supreme Powers*, or (d) *Taking the Sword* against Those who are regularly commission'd by Them: It has not, by minutely pointing out *excepted Cases*, and shewing Men *how near* They may approach to the Confines of Sin without falling into it,

(a) Rom. XIII. 1—6. (b) — XII. 19. (c) Jude 8. (d) Matt. XXVI. 52.

invited Human Nature, of itself more than sufficiently inclined, to Sedition and Rebellion: But by requiring Its Professors in general to (a) *study to be quiet*, and Its Teachers to (b) *put Them in Mind to be Subject to Principalities and Powers*, It has at once best provided for its own favorable Reception, and for the Social Happiness of Mankind.

I must not close This Head without considering the State of our Liberty as We are *Members* of That *Society* which is most properly *Christian*; and how it is affected by our becoming Subjects of CHRIST'S *spiritual* Kingdom: A *Kingdom*, which, tho' not (c) *OF this World*, either with regard to its Origin or its Consummation, yet plainly appears intended by its Divine Founder to have a real Existence, (d) *as a Visible Society*, *IN* This World; and as such to have visible Offices, Ordinances, and Administrations; and These conducted by *Persons* regularly *called* and commission'd for That Purpose: To whom He has delegated so much *Authority* (and, by Consequence, so far *limited* the *Freedom* of others) as the Nature and Ends of Their Institution require.

What Those Ends are for which the *Christian Church* and *Christian Ministry* were instituted, may easily be learned from such Passages as relate to the Institution itself. Where (we find) Christianity considers Mankind in general as being *Chil-*

(a) 1 Th. IV. 11. (b) Tit. III. 1. (c) Joh. XVIII. 36. (d) For a full *Proof* of what cou'd here be only *asserted*, I may refer particularly, among many others, to

ABp. Potter's Discourse on Church Government,
Mr. Burseough's Treatise on Church Government, and
Dr. Rogers's Discourse on the Visible and Invisible Church, and
the Review of it.

dren,

aren, both on Account of Their Want of some Instruction, and the Danger They are in of being
 (a) *tossed to and fro, and carry'd about with every Wind of Doctrine*: And such, with regard to Divine Truths We, all of Us, in Fact, *naturally* are. Accordingly, among the various (b) *Gifts which CHRIST gave unto Men*, the many gracious Provisions He made for the Exigences of our Nature, (c) *He gave some Apostles, some Prophets, some Evangelists, some Pastors and Teachers*; (d) *For the Perfecting of the Saints unto the Work of the Ministry, unto the Edifying of the Body of CHRIST*: (e) *Till We all come into the Unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledge of the Son of GOD, unto a perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of CHRIST*. From which Passage compared with others, particularly Those wherein *Decency* and *Order* in the Publick Offices are required to be provided for without being particularly defined; the least that can be collected must be Thus much; That the Institution We are considering, was intended for the Preservation of the (f) *One Faith*, that is, of the Profession of the Doctrines *Essential* to the Christian Covenant; the Instruction and Edification of particular Christians in These *Fundamental* Truths; and the Maintenance of Decency and Regularity in the Sacred Offices of the Church. If therefore We will suppose Christianity to be a *consistent* Scheme; as on the one Hand, all the *Liberty* that can well be reconciled to the Prosecution of These Ends, may be allowed to *private* Christians; so on the other, whatever *Authority* is

(a) Eph. IV. 14. (b) v. 8. (c) v. 11. (d) v. 12. (e) v. 13. (f) v. 5.

necessary to the Attainment of Them, must be supposed to be entrusted with Those Persons, whose Office and Duty it is to provide for and promote them.

Here then the Liberty of particular Christians may be considered with reference either to *Private Judgement*, or to such *Religious Acts* as are of a *Publick* Nature. As to *Private Judgement*; the *Liberty* of This is unquestionably the *Right*, I will add, the *Exercise* of it, in Proportion to Their Abilites and Opportunities, is the *Duty*, of all Christians. I say, *in Proportion to their Abilites*; because 'tis material to observe, in relation to Matters of *Religion* as well as *all others*, that the *Exercise* of private Judgement ought not in Reason or *Prudence* to be extended beyond the *Power* of it. If Men will insist on a Liberty of *Exercising themselves in Matters too high for them*, and of rejecting That Assistance which GOD has provided for them; They not only return back into That State of *Uncertainty* and *Fluctuation* from which the Christian Ministry was intended to relieve them, but become doubly chargeable, in GOD's Account, with such Errors and Misconduct, as Their Vanity and Neglect of His Ordinance shall occasion. However, as private Judgement, so long as it is really *Private*, is a Matter purely *Personal*; Men are accountable for it to *GOD*, and to Him *only*. But the Case of every Thing to be transacted in *Publick* is very different; as particularly, What *Doctrines* shall be *taught*, what *Usages observed*, what *Persons* admitted to *teach* the one and to *officiate* in the other, &c. These are Matters of a *Social* Concern :

cern: They must therefore be subject to such Regulations as shall to the Society appear necessary to secure the Ends of its Institution: And such Regulations, when made, become *proper Limitations* of private Liberty.

True indeed it is, that all Men, all Bodies of Men, are *fallible*; They *may* require the Profession of Doctrines, or They *may* enjoyn Conformity with Observances, contrary to GOD's Word: And when This *is* the Case, or when to private Christians, upon the best Judgement They are able to form, This *appears to be* the Case; the Rule to such Persons is, *To obey GOD rather than Man*. The Obligations we are under as Members of CHRIST's Church are all founded on our antecedent Obligation to CHRIST as the Head of it; and therefore, We may be sure, ought never to supersede or overrule it. But still; if our Blessed LORD by founding His Church, and appointing a regular Ministry in it, has not *taken away* from its Members the Liberty of private Judgement, He has however graciously *directed* and *assisted* the Exercise of it. And surely They are concern'd, in order to express a due Regard to Their Saviour's Institution, as well as to partake of the Advantages of it, to proceed with Caution, and to deal fairly with themselves: Not condemning what has the Sanction of publick Authority without an impartial Examination; nor mistaking the Suggestions of Passion or Prejudice for Dictates of Conscience. Those must be *Doctrines*, not only of *undoubted Truth*, but of *great Importance*, for the Sake of which *private* Christians can be excused

cused in publicly opposing the Determinations, and breaking the Peace and Harmony, of the Church. And as to mere *Ceremonies*; Nothing less than Conviction of the Unlawfulness of the Thing enjoined will justify a Non-Compliance with the Injunctions of *lawful Authority*. Notions of *Expediency*, or Hopes of *better Edification*, will by no Means reach the Case. In all well-regulated Societies, Matters of Decency and Expediency, of Order and Government must be refer'd, not to every Man's *Private Judgment*, but to the Determination of *Publick Wisdom*. A Liberty beyond This must be productive of endless *Disorder and Confusion*: It cannot therefore have (a) *GOD for its Author*; nor be (b) *That Liberty wherewith CHRIST hath made His Subjects Free*.

Let me only add, that if private Christians must act according to Their own best Judgement, so must the Church as a Society act likewise. And, if the Former shall take to Themselves a Liberty of professing, and even of Teaching, and propagating, such Doctrines, as are in the Society's Judgement subversive of the Christian Covenant; or of introducing such *Customs* into Divine Worship as (c) *the Churches of GOD are Strangers to*: let Their private Judgement be what it will, the Society, on the other Hand, must certainly be allowed a *Liberty* of providing for its *own Preservation*, and for the Security and Promotion of Those Ends for which it was instituted: Otherwise We shall assert to *particular Members* a Liberty destructive, not of the Liberty only, but of the very *Being*, of the *Society itself*.

(a) 1 Cor. XIV. 33. (b) Gal. V. 1. (c) 1 Cor. XI. 16.

By This Time, I hope, it may in General appear, What *That Liberty* is which We can *justly challenge*, or *reasonably desire*, as *Men* or as *Christians*; as *Subjects* under *Civil Government*, or as *Members* of the *Church of CHRIST*: A Liberty indeed, in each of These Respects, subject to *some Restraints*; but such Restraints as, at the same Time that They limit and inclose our Freedom, do also most effectually fence and secure it. This has in Part already appeared, but may perhaps more sensibly affect us, if We recollect, as was proposed,

II. *Secondly*, The *pernicious Consequences* of Liberty pursued *too far*; as *exemplify'd* in the Times, which the present Solemnity brings to our Remembrance.

And here, it were easy to point out the many flagrant *Abuses* and *fatal Effects* of Liberty, in each of the Views under which the present Subject has been already considered. But the Two General Heads of *Religion* and *Civil Government* will afford us abundant Evidence in the Case before Us, and more than can here be distinctly insisted on.

To begin with Abuses of Liberty in *Religion*. A Name never more used, never more vilely prostituted, than in the Times now under our Consideration! in which Villanies of all Kinds were attempted, and by a just Providence permitted to be accomplish'd, under the sanctify'd Pretence of *Religion*, and in the Name of the LORD. In what Manner These Good Men provided for the Honour of GOD and of His Holy Religion, We

We shall soon see. The first Step to be taken towards the Work of *Subversion*, was to withdraw the Attention and Regards of the People from their proper *Pastors*. Accordingly, Men of all Capacities and Occupations were then invited to *Think for Themselves*, and encouraged to determine the most important Questions, without ever consulting Those, who were by Study prepared, by Profession set apart, and by Commis- sion authorized, to direct and instruct them. The Invitation was flattering; and as usually happens in like Cases, Those who had the worst Title to such Encouragement were most forward to embrace it. Nor cou'd This Liberty of *Judg- ing* for Themselves long satisfy These Men's Va- nity: They soon took upon Them, what Their Abettors had never designed for Them, a Liberty of setting up for *Teachers to others*. (a) *When They came together* to the sacred Offices, They who might more properly *have occupied the Place of the Unlearned*, must needs *every one* of them *have His Psalm, every one His Doctrine, every one His Interpretation*, and not a Few their pretended *Revelations*. The *Annals* of Those Times, and even the Complaints of their own (b) Writers, will not suffer Us to forget, What *malicious* Use was then made of This licentious Freedom with the *sacred Oracles*! What monstrous Perversions of the *Gospel of Peace* to the Purposes of Rebel- lion and Parricide! What horrid (c) Blasphemies were then broached and propagated! Whilst

(a) 1 Cor. XIV. 26. (b) See particularly *Edwards's Gangræna*.
 (c) See some of These collected in a late Tract, intituled, *The Mi- serable and distracted State of Religion upon the Downfal of the Establishment*.

every Person was admitted to officiate, every Doctrine to be taught, every Form of Worship to be used, but such as had the *Recommendation* (as it *ought* to have been accounted) of *Lawful Authority*. The Result You all know. That ancient and venerable *Order* of Men, which had *presided* in the Christian Church ever since it had a Being, fell a Sacrifice to the blind Rage of misguided Zealots and Enthusiasts! That grave and decent Service, with which our Forefathers had been greatly edify'd and had *worship'd the LORD in the Beauty of Holiness*, was trampled under Foot by These our new *Reformers*! And into the Place of These pretended Corruptions were received --- what shall I say? what indeed *can* be said? since not any *determinate* Form of Worship or Polity succeeded; but a Medley of Sects, dividing and subdividing into an endless Variety of senseless Opinions and Modes of Worship, unworthy of GOD, destructive of pure Religion, and highly dishonourable to the injured Name of Protestantism!

But surely, whatever else a deluded People might forfeit, This was the Way to That *Liberty of Conscience*, for which They express'd so ardent a Zeal. --- *Liberty of Conscience* was indeed what most of Them at first profess'd to have in View: But never were Men more out of the Road to it. When once They forsook its most faithful Guardian, the *Church of England*, They took Leave of *true Liberty* together with it; and soon perceived They had fled from an *imaginary* Spiritual Tyranny to a *real* one in all its various Forms; under a Set of Men, who, while *out of Power* talk'd

of Nothing but *Forbearance*, *Moderation*, and the *Spirit of Meekness*; but, when *in Power*, found out a very different Meaning to explain These *good Words* in to others from That, in which They had demanded the Benefit of them for Themselves. Each of the Perswasions in its Turn had its *Covenants* or its *Engagements*, each its Engine of one Kind or other, for fettering the Judgements, and torturing the Consciences of Mankind. In the mean Time, many observing the unhappy Consequences of a wanton Departure from a *well-temper'd* Authority, became prepared to repose Themselves on *any* that shou'd first offer itself to Them: And accordingly great Numbers, after having *strain'd at* the Power of the *English* Hierarchy, made no Difficulty of submitting to the Dominion of *Popery*. Whilst others took This Opportunity of propagating, with too much Success, the yet more *slavish* Tenets of *Deism*, *Fatalism*, and *Atheism*. --- These were *some* of the Blessed Effects of That *Liberty of Thinking* which was then compleatly tryed: as compleatly (I mean) as it ever *can* be tryed! And methinks They are such, as shou'd not make a *sober* People fond of *repeating* the Experiment!

The Distractions in the *State* did in Those Days (as indeed They always will) very remarkably keep pace with Those in the *Church*. The plausible Pretence in one Case was, That of *Reforming Corruptions*; in the other, That of *Redressing Grievances*. How They succeeded in the Work of *Reformation*, we have already seen; And the *Redress* They effected so nearly resembled it, both in its Progress and its Issue, that I need hardly
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enlarge on any Particulars of it. The lowest of the People were encouraged to make free with the Characters, and to pass Sentence on the Conduct of, Their Governours: *Their Tongues*, at least, *were Their own*, and They had, in respect of Those, *no Lord over Them*. To enflame Their Zeal, Jealousies were artfully sown, and industriously spread among Them, of dangerous Designs upon Their *Liberties* and *Properties*: *Things* ever justly valued by Mankind; and no wonder then if Their *Names*, however misapply'd, gave the ambitious and discontented an Opportunity of drawing in with Them much better Men into Their subversive Projects. What Occasions might have been given to call for some Redress, in a *Legal* and regular Method, I presume not to say; and indeed, it is the less necessary here to enquire, since, in fact, it soon appear'd, that the great Grievance to be redress'd (I mean, in the Intention of *too many*, tho' not of Them *all*) was the *Constitution itself*. For when all their other Complaints were removed; when Their Prince had given Way to Their Encroachments on His Royal Prerogative, in a Manner that demonstrated, how tenderly He loved His People, and how ardently He desired to make Them easy and happy; were These pretended *Patriots* satisfy'd? --- Every Concession served only for an Invitation to some more extravagant Demand. From Grievances successfully represented They proceeded to ensnaring Petitions: from Petitions graciously heard, and granted (as far as they cou'd with *Honesty*, farther than they cou'd with *Safety*, be granted) They were emboldened to draw up se-

ditionous Remonstrances: Remonstrances within Doors soon produced Remonstrances in the Field, and at the Head of Armies, against Their Sovereign. The Time wou'd fail me to enumerate the various Acts of Hypocrisy, Treachery, Violence, Cruelty, which made Way for That enormous *One*, into which they were all summ'd up, as on *This* Day! A Fact attended with every Circumstance of Aggravation and Horrour! May the heinous Guilt of it never be visited on Us or our Posterity!

Liberty still was the Cry of the infatuated Multitude. To secure *This*, as They flatter'd Themselves, They had now removed *all the ancient Landmarks* of the Constitution, and That insupportable Grievance, the Monarchy itself. But when They had accomplish'd all This, did They find Themselves *in Possession* of what They had pursued thro' so much Iniquity and Bloodshed? Was the Nation *more free* and flourishing, or particular Persons *more secure* in their Properties, than They had been *before*? Cou'd They speak for Themselves, They wou'd tell us, the Reverse of all This was true. When once a few crafty Leaders had, by the Assistance of a deluded Populace, got That *Power* into Their own Hands, which They had inveigh'd against in Those of others; They soon made it appear, What Kind of Liberty They had cut out for Themselves, and how very different an one They had in Reserve for Their Followers: For Themselves, a Liberty to oppress, decimate, plunder, and destroy whomsoever They found too honest to become subservient to Their Villanies, or rich enough to fall a
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Sacrifice to Their Avarice: For Their Followers, a Liberty *to go forth, such as were for Death, to the Death; such as were for the Sword, to the Sword; and such as were for the Captivity, to the Captivity.* New and unheard-of Taxes were then arbitrarily imposed; New Courts of Judicature erected; New Methods of Torture invented and exercised. *Civil Property* cou'd not long continue secure from grievous *Compositions for Delinquency*, after *Church Lands* had been invaded by Their rapacious *Ordinances*. And, tho' such as had adhered to the Royal Cause were on some Occasions distinguished by *peculiar Marks of Resentment*; Yet These were far from being the *only* Sufferers. Those, who had been among the first Fomenters of the Nations Disorders, were now some of the deepest Sharers in its Calamities: They now *felt* Those Grievances They had *only complain'd* of before; When Their Rebellion against a Prince whom They unrighteously accused of *chastising Them with Whips*, had, by GOD's just Judgement, subjected Them to the extreme Tyranny of an Usurper, who *really chastised Them with Scorpions*.

Such were the deplorable Circumstances, under which This Nation then groaned, both in its *Religious* and *Civil* Capacity; and such will always be the Consequences of Men's carrying their Notions and Pursuits of Liberty *too far*, to the Ruin of Order and Government, and *with Them* of all *valuable* Liberty itself. --- It remains then,

III. *Lastly*, That a *suitable Application* be made of the foregoing Particulars.

And what Application can be better suited to the
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the present Subject or the present Occasion, than to exhort one another to set a *just Value* upon That *Legal Liberty* we of This Nation enjoy; *not meddling with Those that are given to Change*; nor suffering ourselves to be deluded by specious Pretences or fair *Promises* of farther *Liberty*, into any Attempts tending to the Subversion of our excellent Constitution, in *either* of its Branches; which must sooner or later end in the Ruin of *Both*. And

First, With regard to the *State*: Let the Remembrance of Those *unexpected Lengths*, to which the Iniquities and Distractions we have been reviewing, were carried, teach Us to beware of the *First Motions* towards National Troubles.

The Beginning of Strife, especially between Prince and People, or between two powerful Parties of the latter, *is as when one letteth out Water*: and 'tis impossible to say, where the Breach may end, or the Inundation be stop'd. I am willing to believe, no very considerable Number of Those Persons, who *first* engaged in the Measures we have been recollecting, had any Thoughts of taking such Steps as They soon after found, or *thought* They found, necessary. But, alas! when well-settled Constitutions are once unadvisedly broken in upon; when Men's Passions are heated, and their Jealousies set to work; no Man can foresee, how far Those about Him, or even *Himself*, may afterwards be carried. The Gradation, hinted at by (a) *St. Paul*, was by our Fore-fathers found but too easy and natural, from *Backbiting* and Calumniating the Actions of Their Governours, to *Whisperings* and secret Cabals against

(a) 2 Cor. XII. 20.

Them; from *Whisperings* to *Swellings* and Menaces; from *Swellings* to *Tumults* and Riotous Assemblings: thence the Transition became almost unavoidable to open and avowed *Rebellion*: Till after having passed thro' a Sea of Blood of Their *Fellow-Subjects*, They scrupled not at last to embrew Their guilty Hands in That of Their *anointed Sovereign*.

(a) *Now all These Things were our Examples; to the Intent we shou'd not lust after Evil Things as They also lusted*: That we shou'd not indulge a wanton Humour of disturbing Settlements, but shou'd know when we are well. We shou'd hence learn the Folly, as well as the Iniquity, of giving Way to the Suggestions of Spleen and Resentment against our Superiors, and of engaging so far in Party-Disputes, as to put it out of our Power either to retreat with Safety, or to proceed with Innocence. Let Us reverence the *Laws* as the best Preservatives of our *Liberties*, and cheerfully pay all That Honour and Obedience to our Gracious *Sovereign*, which Reason and Religion demand from Us. The crying Sin We are This Day assembled to lament, and the Calamities that succeeded it, are a standing Admonition to Us against rashly crediting such Persons as *promise us Liberty*, but wou'd in all Probability, perhaps without being Themselves aware of it, soon *bring Us into Bondage*.

Give me Leave to subjoyn the like Caution, with regard to the *Ecclesiastical* Part of our Constitution, against the like ensnaring Pretences of *farther Liberty* and a *purser Reformation*.

(a) 1 Cor. X. 6.

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Reformation is unquestionably a glorious Work, where it is *indeed* wanted; where the Corruptions complain'd of are *real* ones; where the Advantages *reasonably* expected will counterbalance the Hazards attending all *merely Human* Attempts This Way; where it is begun regularly and by proper Authority; where it is conducted not only by warm Hearts but cool Heads, and such as know when They have done enough. *Such* a Reformation This Church and Nation was once blest'd with. But when some of our Forefathers, not content with Throwing off the Burthen of *Romish* Ceremonies, and Their still less tolerable Superstitions and Idolatries; went forward, in Their *excessive* Zeal, to *reform away* Decency, and Solemnity, and Primitive Usage; the Consequences were such as I need not *now* repeat in *Narration*; and such as, I presume, no Lover of His Country wou'd wish to see repeated in *Fact* and Experience.

But our *present Reformers* are better acquainted with the Nature and Principles of Religious Liberty, than Their Forefathers were: *They* wou'd make a very different Use of Power if it were in *Their* Hands: Nay some of Them (for it is far from being the Language of Them *all*) wou'd fain perswade Us, They mean *no Harm* to the Church of *England*, in Their Attempts to deprive it of every *Human* Security. I am not disposed to question the Sincerity of such Professions. We must however have Leave to remember, that for Men to *talk of making* a good Use of the Power They want, and to *make* a good Use of the Power They enjoy, *have been* very different Things.

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And, had we not so good Evidence of This Truth from *Experience*, yet a little Jealousy might be excused from the apparent *Temper* of some late Advocates for *Liberty*; whose Pleas in its Favour are not so much as a *Cloke* of Their unkind Purposes towards Us. For surely, no great Matters can be depended on from the *Tolerating* Spirit of Those Persons, were *We* upon Terms of supplicating it, who can at present allow Themselves in all the Arts of Misrepresentation, in Order to blacken (not to say, *persecute*) the Reputations of Those Advocates for our Faith while living, and Their Memories when dead, who had set Them Examples of a *real Moderation* in every Respect, the Force of Their Reasonings only excepted.

After all, We might ask, "What there is in the Church established, that calls so loudly for a Reformation?" But there is the less Occasion (wou'd the Time permit) to descend to the *Particulars* of This Challenge, not only because *These* have been over and over fully vindicated, but because some of the present Friends to Liberty (its *only* Friends as They wou'd be thought) are pleased to declare openly against the *Whole* of This, and all other *Religious Settlements, as such*. To satisfy *Them*, (it seems) All Inclosures must be thrown down, all Creeds and Subscriptions taken away, all Uniformity in Divine Worship left at large; and Nothing required as a Term of *Communion*, or even as a Qualification for the *Teachers* in Religion, but the Profession of the *One Article*, or (in Terms equally indefinite) of *what is necessary to denominate a Man a Christian*. I stay not now to examine, how far This Scheme is reconcileable

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with the Directions, which *CHRIST* and *His Apostles* have left us, relating to the *Christian Church*; nor how far it may be really *practicable*. But We must be allowed to enquire, What *Consequences* are to be expected from This *thorough* Reformation, supposing They *could* be gratify'd? They will *promise* Us a *Glorious State of universal Liberty*. But, is it to be imagined, that a Nation, not wholly abandoned to all Sense of Religion, could for *any Time* continue in such a State as This? Wou'd all Christians be at once set at Liberty from Their Passions and Their Prejudices? And particularly, wou'd the *Teachers* of Religion (for *Teachers*, I suppose, there must be so long as there is *Religion*) be by This Means divested of That *Lust of Power*, from which Some at present *affect* to be under such dreadful Apprehensions? Alas! the *Denominations* of the contending Parties might be changed, but the *Contentions* themselves wou'd remain as fierce as ever. We shou'd soon have Teacher setting up against Teacher; each proposing a different Interpretation of the *One Article*, and of *what is necessary to denominate a Man a Christian*; each zealous for the Prevalence of His own; and probably the more so, in Proportion to the Hopes, He might flatter Himself with, of being able to draw the, *then vacant*, publick Encouragements towards it. In the meanwhile, Those of the *People*, whom This Scheme shou'd find in a Posture of Indifference to all Religion, wou'd soon be advanced by it into the *Seat of the Scornful*; whilst it wou'd drive the more devout into the Arms of the *Romish* Emisary: Of the rest, some wou'd fall in with one

Leader,

Leader, some with another; *one* declaring for *Paul*, another for *Apollos*, a third for *Cephas*, and a fourth disclaiming all subordinate Authority or Instruction, and insisting on His *immediate* Relation to *CHRIST*. The Distractions must needs be, *for some Time*, most deplorable; and the Issue of them (if our Situation with respect to our *Neighbours* be considered) probably not much less so. Only Thus much We may be well assured of, that no Issue of them cou'd be more dreaded by the Enemies, or more heartily prayed for by the Friends (I say not, of *Religion* only, but) of all *valuable Liberty*, than a Revival of That excellent Establishment, which as on *This Day* fell a Sacrifice, with its most faithful *Defender*, the *Royal Martyr*, at the Head of it; which was since, by GOD's good Providence, wonderfully *restored*, and is still graciously *continued* to Us; and which (if We are content to learn Wisdom at the Expence of our Forefathers) We shall not again wantonly cast away from Us.

To conclude. The Constitution We live under, is, in both its Branches, so happily situated, as to partake of the Beneficial Influences of a *just Authority* and a *sober Liberty*, and to avoid the Extremes of *Tyranny* on one Hand, and *Licentiousness* on the other: A Constitution, under which We may be as secure, as any Thing *Human* can secure Us, in our Persons and our Properties, in our Lives and (what are justly yet dearer to us) our *Consciences*: A Constitution, by a due Improvement of the Advantages of which, We may be *easy* in This World, and *happy* in a far better. Let us then at once shew ourselves

selves worthy of These Blessings, and secure the Continuance of them, by (a) *rendring unto Cesar the Things which are Cesar's, and unto GOD the Things that are GOD's*: Expressing our Affection for our Country, by *praying for its Peace*, and by contributing our *honest Industry*, in our *proper Station*, towards its Prosperity; and our Zeal for our *Holy Religion*, by a constant and devout Attendance on its Worship and its Ordinances, and by adorning it with all the Virtues and Graces of a *truly Christian Life*. --- Schemes of farther *Liberty*, of greater *Perfection*, look plausible in *Theory*, and inviting at a *Distance*; and might perhaps answer our Expectations tolerably well upon a *nearer View*, were both the principal Conductors of them, and Their subordinate Instruments, (in other Words, were all Mankind) Those purely *rational*, Those intirely *dispassionate* Beings, which unexperienced Projectors generally presume upon finding Them to be. But, till This is the Case, that is, till we arrive at *That Jerusalem which is above*, and which alone is *perfectly*, because it alone cou'd be *securely, Free*; Let Us cheerfully embrace Those Restraints, which our present Situation renders necessary for Us: And (b) *whereunto We have already attained, let Us walk by the same Rule, let Us mind the same Thing*. 4 00 58

(a) Matt. XXII. 21. (b) Phil. III. 16.

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